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Seventy-second year

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New York

President:	Mr. Rycroft	(United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland)
Members:	Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Mr. Llorentty Soliz
	China	Mr. Shen Bo
	Egypt	Mr. Aboulatta
	Ethiopia	Mr. Woldegerima
	France	Mr. Delattre
	Italy	Mr. Cardi
	Japan	Mr. Bessho
	Kazakhstan	Mr. Sadykov
	Russian Federation	Mr. Safronkov
	Senegal	Mr. Ciss
	Sweden	Mr. Skau
	Ukraine	Mr. Vitrenko
	United States of America	Ms. Sison
	Uruguay	Mr. Rosselli

Agenda

Briefing by the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator

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The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

Briefing by the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator

The President: In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Stephen O'Brien, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, to participate in this meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I give the floor to Mr. O'Brien.

Mr. O'Brien: I would like to thank you, Mr. President, and all the Security Council members, for inviting me to brief the Council on my visit in recent days to countries facing, or at risk of, famine — Yemen, South Sudan and Somalia. I will also briefly discuss the outcome of the Oslo Humanitarian Conference on Nigeria and the Lake Chad Region. I have also been to the Somali region of Ethiopia and visited northern Kenya, where pastoralists are the worst affected by the terrible drought in that part of the African continent. More than 2.7 million Kenyans are now food-insecure, a number likely to reach 4 million by April. In collaboration with the Government of Kenya, the United Nations will soon launch an appeal for $200 million to provide urgent lifesaving assistance and protection. However, in the following remarks I will focus on my other visits over the past 16 days.

I turn first to Yemen. The humanitarian crisis there is already the largest in the world, and the Yemeni people now face the spectre of famine. Today, two thirds of the population — 18.8 million people — need assistance, while more than 7 million are hungry and do not know where their next meal will come from. That is 3 million more than in January. As the fighting in Yemen continues and escalates, displacement increases. With health facilities destroyed or damaged, diseases are sweeping through the country.

I spoke with people in Aden, Ibb, Sana'a and from Taiz. They told me horrific stories of displacement, of escaping unspeakable violence and destruction in Mokha and Taiz city in Taiz governorate. I saw first-hand the effects of losing home and livelihood — malnourishment, hunger and squalid living conditions in destroyed schools, unfinished apartments and wet concrete basements. In the past two months alone, more than 48,000 people have fled fighting, mines and improvised explosive devices in Mokha town and the surrounding fields alone. I met countless malnourished and sick children. My small team met a girl who had been displaced to Ibb who still had shrapnel wounds in her leg, while her brother was deeply traumatized. I was introduced to a 13-year-old girl who had fled Taiz city, left in charge of her seven siblings. I spoke with families living in a ruined school who had been displaced to Aden when their homes were destroyed by air strikes. All of them told me three things — they are hungry, they are sick and they need peace so that they can return home.

I travelled to Aden on the first United Nations humanitarian flight and met the President, Prime Minister and Foreign Minister of the Republic of Yemen. I also met with the senior leadership of the Houthi and General People's Congress authorities in Sana'a. I discussed the humanitarian situation and the importance of preventing a famine, better respecting international humanitarian law and protecting civilians. I demanded full, safe and unimpeded humanitarian access. All my counterparts promised to facilitate sustained access and to respect international humanitarian law. Yet all parties to the conflict are arbitrarily denying sustained humanitarian access and are politicizing aid. Already, the humanitarian suffering that we are seeing in Yemen today is caused by the parties and proxies, and if they do not change their behaviour immediately, they will have to be held accountable for the inevitable famine, unnecessary deaths and associated increase in suffering that will follow.

Despite the almost impossible and terrifying conditions, the United Nations and its humanitarian partners are not deterred and are stepping up to meet the humanitarian needs across the country. In February alone, 4.9 million people received food assistance. We continue to negotiate access and make modest gains. For instance, despite assurances from all the parties of safe passage to Taiz city, I and my team were denied access and had to retreat a short distance to safety when we came under gunfire. But we managed to use that experience to enable us to clear the way to reach people inside Taiz city with the first humanitarian truck delivery, bringing eight tons of essential medicines on

the city road from Ibb to Taiz, since August 2016. We will leave no stone unturned in order to find alternative routes. We must prevail, because so many lives depend on us, the full range of the humanitarian family.

For 2017, the humanitarian community requires $2.1 billion in order to reach 12 million people in Yemen with lifesaving assistance and protection. Only 6 per cent of that funding has been received so far. An international ministeria-level pledging event is scheduled for 25 April, but the situation is so dire that I ask donors to give urgently now. All contributions and pledges made starting 1 January will be counted at that event.

I continue to reiterate the same message to all: it is only a political solution that will ultimately end human suffering and bring stability to the region. And at this stage, only a combined response with the private sector can avert a famine. Commercial imports must be allowed to resume through all entry points in Yemen, including, and especially, Hudaydah port, which must be kept open and expanded. With access and funding, humanitarian workers will do more, but they are not the long-term solution to the growing crisis.

As I just mentioned, a ministerial-level pledging event for the humanitarian response in Yemen for 2017 will take place in Geneva on 25 April. The Secretary-General will chair the event, co-hosted by the Foreign Ministers of Sweden and Switzerland, to advocate for more resources and access. For 2017, the Yemen humanitarian response plan asks for $2.1 billion to assist 12 million people in need across all 22 governorates.

Turning to South Sudan, which I visited on 4 and 5 March, the situation is worse than it has ever been. The famine in South Sudan is man-made. Parties to the conflict are parties to the famine — as are those not intervening to make the violence stop.

More than 7.5 million people need assistance, up by 1.4 million from last year. About 3.4 million people are displaced, of which almost 200,000 have fled South Sudan since January alone. A localized famine was declared for Leer and Mayendit on 20 February, an area where violence and insecurity have compromised humanitarian access for years. More than 1 million children are estimated to be acutely malnourished across the country, including 270,000 children who face the imminent risk of death should they not be reached in time with assistance. Meanwhile, the cholera outbreak that began in June 2016 has spread to more locations.

I travelled to Ganyiel, in Unity state, where people have fled from the horrors of famine and conflict. I saw the impact humanitarians can have in alleviating suffering. I met an elderly woman with her malnourished grandson receiving treatment. I listened to women who fled fighting, wading through waist-high swamps with their children, to receive food and medicine. Some of those women have experienced the most appalling acts of sexual violence — which continues to be used as a weapon of war. Their harrowing stories are only a few among thousands who have suffered a similar fate across the country.

Humanitarians are delivering. Last year, partners reached more than 5.1 million people with assistance. However, active hostilities, access denials and bureaucratic impediments continue to curtail their efforts to reach people who desperately need help. Aid workers have been killed. Humanitarian compounds and supplies have been attacked, looted and occupied by armed actors. Recently, humanitarians had to leave one of the famine-affected counties because of fighting. Assurances by senior Government officials of unconditional access and no bureaucratic impediments now need to be turned into action on the ground.

In Somalia, more than half the population — 6.2 million people — need humanitarian and protection assistance, including 2.9 million who are at risk of famine and require immediate assistance to save or sustain their lives. Close to 1 million children under the age of 5 will be acutely malnourished this year. In the past two months alone, nearly 160,000 people have been displaced due to severe drought conditions, adding to the already 1.1 million people who live in appalling conditions around the country.

What I saw and heard during my visit to Somalia was distressing — women and children walk for weeks in search of food and water. They have lost their livestock, water sources have dried up and they have nothing left to survive on. With everything lost, women, boys, girls and men now move to urban centres.

We visited Baidoa with the Secretary-General, on his first field mission since he took office. We met with displaced people going through ordeals none of us could imagine. We visited the regional hospital where children and adults are desperately fighting to survive diarrhoea, cholera and malnutrition. Again, as if proof were needed, it was clear that between malnutrition and death there is always disease.

Large parts of southern and central Somalia remain under the control or influence of Al-Shabaab, and the security situation is volatile. Last year, some 165 violent incidents — an 18 per cent increase compared to 2015 — directly impacted humanitarian work and resulted in the deaths of 14 aid workers. Al-Shabaab, Government forces and other militia also continue to block major supply routes to towns in 29 of the 42 districts in southern and central Somalia. That has restricted access to markets, basic commodities and services, and is severely disrupting livelihoods. Blockades and double taxation bar farmers from transporting their grains. It is critical that Somali forces and those of the African Union Mission in Somalia secure vital road access to enable both lifesaving aid and longer term recovery. A lot of hope is placed in the new Government.

The current indicators mirror the tragic picture of 2011, when Somalia last suffered a famine. It should be noted that by the time the famine was recognized in 2011, half of the 260,000 people who died in the famine had already died. That is important for points I will make shortly. However, humanitarian partners now have a larger footprint, mature cash programming, better data through assessments, better controls on resources and vetting of partners, as well as stronger partnership with Government authorities. The Government recently declared the drought a national disaster and is taking steps to work with humanitarian partners to ensure a coordinated response. To be clear, we can avert a famine in Somalia. We have a committed new President who has been clear, a humanitarian and resilience track record and a detailed plan. We are ready despite the incredible risks and dangers. We have local and international leadership. We have a lot of access. And now we need the international community, gathered here, as well as donor agencies and nations, to invest in Somalia. It is lifesaving but we do need those huge funds now.

For all three of those situations, as well as for north-east Nigeria, an immediate injection of funds, plus safe and unimpeded access, are required to enable partners to avert a catastrophe; otherwise, many people will predictably die from hunger, livelihoods will be lost and political gains, which have been hard-won over the last few years, will be reversed. To be precise, we need $4.4 billion by July — and that is a detailed cost, not a negotiating number.

Before I visited all those countries, I was in Oslo, where the Governments of Norway, Germany and Nigeria, in partnership with the United Nations, organized a humanitarian conference on Nigeria and the Lake Chad region. Ten million seven hundred thousand million people need humanitarian assistance and protection, including 7.1 million people who are severely food insecure. Humanitarian partners scaled up their response to reach the most vulnerable groups threatened by violence, food insecurity and famine, particularly in north-east Nigeria — many Council members saw that for themselves on their recent mission to the region. Fourteen donors have pledged a total of $672 million, of which $458 million is for humanitarian action in 2017. That is very good news; I commend those who made such generous pledges, and I urge others to follow suit. More is needed, however, to secure the $1.5 billion required to provide the assistance needed across the Lake Chad region.

We stand at a critical point in our history. Already, at the beginning of the year, we are facing the largest humanitarian crisis since the establishment of the United Nations. More than 20 million people across four countries now face starvation and famine. Without collective and coordinated global efforts, people will simply starve to death. Many more will suffer and die from disease. Children will be stunted and out of school. Livelihoods, futures and hope will be lost. Communities' resilience will rapidly wilt away. Development gains will be reversed. Many will be displaced and will continue to move in search for survival, creating ever more instability across entire regions. The warning call and appeal for action by the Secretary-General can thus not be understated. It was right to take the risk and sound the alarm early, not wait for the pictures of emaciated, dying children on the world's television screens to mobilize a reaction and the funds.

The United Nations and humanitarian partners are responding. We have strategic, coordinated and prioritized plans in every country. We have the right leadership and heroic, dedicated teams on the ground. We are working hand-in-hand with development partners to marry the immediate life-saving with longer-term sustainable development. We are ready to scale up. This is, frankly, not the time to ask for more detail or use that postponing phrase, "What would you prioritize?" Every life on the edge of famine and death is equally worth saving.

Now we need the international community and the Council to act.

First and foremost, it must act quickly to tackle the precipitating factors of famine. Preserving and restoring normal access to food and ensuring all parties' compliance with international humanitarian law are key.

Secondly, with sufficient and timely financial support, humanitarians can still help to prevent the worst-case scenario. To do this, humanitarians require safe, full and unimpeded access to people in need. Parties to the conflict must respect this fundamental tenet of international humanitarian law, and those with influence over the parties must exert that influence now.

Thirdly, the fighting must stop. To continue on the path of war and military conquest is, I think we all know, to guarantee failure, humiliation and moral turpitude, and we will bear the responsibility for the millions who face hunger and deprivation on an incalculable scale because of it.

Allow me very briefly to sum up. The situation for people in each country is dire, and without a major international response, the situation will get worse. All four countries have one thing in common: conflict. This means that we — the Council — have the possibility to prevent and end further misery and suffering. The United Nations and its partners are ready to scale up, but we need the access and the funds to do more. It is all preventable. It is possible to avert this crisis, to avert these famines, to avert these looming human catastrophes.

The President: I thank Mr. O'Brien very much indeed for his briefing.

I shall now give the floor to the members of the Security Council.

Before doing so, I thank Council members in the main for their timekeeping this morning. Again this afternoon the light will start flashing if representatives do not finish their statements within the five minutes, and, if necessary, I will use the gavel to encourage them.

I give the floor to the representative of the Russian Federation, who called this meeting.

Mr. Safronkov (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We would like at the outset to thank Under-Secretary-General Stephen O'Brien for his very comprehensive and objective briefing on the results of his recent visit to a number of countries that find themselves in a very difficult humanitarian situation. In calling for this meeting, we were motivated first and foremost by the need to obtain first-hand evidence about what is taking place in the countries affected by the humanitarian disaster, including as concerns the situation in the Republic of Yemen.

A major part of the population of this country, which is historically friendly to Russia, requires humanitarian assistance. The country is on the verge of famine. Civilian infrastructure lies in ruins, and many businesses and facilities have been destroyed. First and foremost I wish to commend the selfless, brave work of United Nations humanitarian personnel in Yemen, including Humanitarian Coordinator McGoldrick. They continue to deal with the most practical tasks in helping the population of the country.

Our country, through its embassy in Sana'a, has contributed to establishing a secretariat to contribute to cooperation among the humanitarian structures of the United Nations and the local authorities of the Republic of Yemen in the capital. The secretariat will be tasked with solving problems related to the distribution of assistance among those in need . We call on all parties to refrain from any efforts to find a military solution to the situation. Such an approach will not bring about effective and long-term results. This would lead only to increasing misunderstanding and mistrust between the Yemeni parties and undermine prospects for a return to peace. We are convinced that resolving the conflict in Yemen can be done only through political means, through negotiations based on a balanced road map leading to a solution.

Although past efforts of the international community to bring Yemenis to agreement have not been successful, this does not mean that we should simply abandon this undertaking. We are continuing to work through our embassy in the country with all parties to the conflict, urging them to refrain from unilateral decisions that only block the launching of a negotiating process. As Mr. O'Brien rightly said, solutions to all problems in this connection should be sought only through political means.

Obviously, the winners of the Yemeni conflict are the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant and Al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula. With respect to Somalia, only Al-Shabaab is a winner there. Also winning are other the terrorist and extremist groups that control entire

regions in the south and east of Yemen. We know from the experience that we should not put off starting to fight terrorists. Postponing this will only complicate the situation.

We cannot but be concerned by the humanitarian situation in African countries visited by Mr. O'Brien. Many challenges remain in Somalia, where the terrorist group Al-Shabaab has been sowing terror. South Sudan faces equally urgent problems. We also need to unite our efforts at the regional and international levels. It is only through collective efforts that we will find appropriate solutions.

Mr. Delattre (France) (*spoke in French*): I should like to begin by thanking Mr. Stephen O'Brien for his very illuminating briefing and his exemplary commitment, and for his pressing appeal to all actors involved in the face of a situation in which millions of people are threatened with famine in Yemen, Somalia and Nigeria and are already experiencing famine, unfortunately, in South Sudan. I should like also to pay tribute to the admirable work done by humanitarian workers in the field, who are very often working in the most difficult of circumstances.

I should like to convey three main messages today.

The first is that the action of the United Nations, is essential as it is, cannot substitute for the responsibilities that the Governments of these four countries have vis-à-vis their populations. It is these Governments that have the primary responsibility to protect their populations.

In South Sudan, the recent declaration of famine in certain parts of the country is an illustration of the tragic situation that has prevailed in the country for more than three years now due to the political conflict. Because of the fighting and the violence of which they are the deliberate targets, entire populations have had to leave their land and their villages and can no longer provide for themselves. The fear of violence has also meant that some of that land, despite being fertile, has not been planted. Let us not be mistaken here: this famine is largely man-made.

We call upon the Government of South Sudan to take into account the needs of its population. In South Sudan and in Yemen, only a political solution to the conflicts there will make it possible to address the root causes of those conflicts and to put an end to the suffering of the people. In this regard, we support the mediation efforts led by the United Nations, in particular the work of the Special Envoy on Yemen, Ismail Ould Cheikh Ahmed, in enabling the resumption and continuation of negotiations, and an early and lasting cessation of hostilities.

In South Sudan, we call for the rapid implementation of the peace agreement; the national dialogue should not be an obstacle in this respect. The rule of law and good governance are also essential to prevent such scourges. We hope that the commitments undertaken by the new Somali President, Mr. Farmajo, will be followed up by concrete action, particularly with regard to the reform of the security sector.

In South Sudan, constraints on public freedoms is of concern. The second message that I would like to send today is that the United Nations and humanitarian actors must be able to access all people who need their help, without bureaucratic red tape or threats to their security. Mounting tensions — even hostility — with regard to humanitarian actors hamper the delivery of supplies and the provision of basic needs. That is often compounded by the refusal of access by armed groups on the ground, as well as administrative blockages and lengthy bureaucratic procedures. As Mr. O'Brien has just mentioned, there is an ever-growing number of obstacles to humanitarian assistance.

The Governments of the States concerned have a special responsibility. They must ensure safe and unhindered access to the United Nations and humanitarian actors, wherever populations need emergency assistance. The various bureaucratic obstacles imposed by the authorities, in particular the South Sudanese authorities, are helping to slow down the provision of the necessary aid to the most vulnerable populations.

We are particularly concerned about the situation in South Sudan, where humanitarian actors and the United Nations Mission in South Sudan are all too often the target of attacks, harassment or access restrictions. These hindrances are committed by all the parties to the conflict, be it the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA), the SPLA in Opposition, or the various armed groups that are multiplying in the country. These access restrictions must cease immediately. We must collectively and unambiguously express our condemnation of such barriers, which are contrary to international humanitarian law. I recall that all parties to conflicts are obligated to facilitate

the delivery of food supplies. Without that, the mobilization of the international community would be absolutely ineffective.

These problems are also quite acute in Yemen, where the ongoing fighting threatens to further exacerbate the humanitarian situation. The parties to the conflict must immediately cease indiscriminate attacks on civilians and civilian infrastructure. Such actions could be classified as war crimes. It is also imperative that humanitarian actors have unhindered access in order to bring the basic necessities to the population.

The third message I want to deliver today is that in order to cope with the magnitude of the financial need, it is important to foster a comprehensive approach in order to create synergies and to improve coordination with other donors, and to mobilize goodwill, including — as Stephen O'Brien said — private donors and businesses, as well as "non-traditional" donors, in particular emerging economies. It is through general mobilization and the use of all means at our disposal that we can help people in need and respond to the call of Stephen O'Brien. In that context, we welcome the holding of the Yemen donors' conference, to be held 25 April in Geneva.

Mr. Rosselli (Uruguay) (*spoke in Spanish*): This is not the first time that I do not know whether to thank Mr. O'Brien for his briefings, which generally strike at the very core of our being. Of course, we thank him for moving us so profoundly, for doing this in-depth work and for sharing it with us so frequently.

I would have wished to speak before the Ambassador of France, who basically, delivered my entire statement. There is very little left of what I wanted to say that has not already been said by him. Our intention was to speak of the common denominator linking humanitarian crises, which is that they take place within the context of conflicts. It is therefore essential to find a solution to those conflicts. To that end, it is necessary for all who can exert their influence to do so. At the same time, allowing access for humanitarian assistance to the civilian population is fundamental.

Although the French Ambassador completely shattered my statement, allow me to stress one issue that has long been of particular concern to my delegation — indiscriminate attacks against hospitals, schools and civilian infrastructure. Scores of hospitals have been attacked, with great loss of life. In Yemen, for example, half of the existing hospitals are not operational. Given that the essence of what I wanted to say has already been covered, I will not take up any more time.

Ms. Sison (United States of America): I thank Under-Secretary-General O'Brien, whose briefing was clearly not just a set of business-as-usual remarks. Mr. O'Brien just described what could soon become the most serious food-security emergency in the modern era, unless States members of the United Nations act now to stop it.

The United Nations is warning us that more than 20 million people are starving in Yemen, South Sudan, Somalia and the Lake Chad Basin. As Mr. O'Brien pointed out in his briefing, famine has already been declared in some areas of South Sudan. The same could soon follow in Yemen, Somalia and the Lake Chad basin if the international community does not intervene immediately.

Every member of the Security Council and of the United Nations should be outraged that we are confronting famine in the year 2017. Famine is a man-made crisis with man-made solutions. No country should be destined to face famine in a world that has more than enough food to feed every single person. It is not too late to prevent famine from spreading. It is not inevitable. However, preventing famine means that the parties fighting on the ground have to prioritize access to food, health care and other life-saving aid. They must also take measures to reduce the impact of hostilities on the civilian population. We therefore call on the members of the Council to use their influence over the parties in these four situations to allow unfettered access and not obstruct aid.

Additionally, it is vital that the United Nations and its partners have the resources they need in order to respond. Right now, only 1.6 per cent of the four appeals for Yemen, South Sudan, Somalia and Nigeria are funded. Collectively, we must contribute more to this relief effort. By numbers of people at risk, the stakes in Yemen are the highest, as Mr. O'Brien has impressed upon us. The United Nations has assessed that 65 per cent of all households in Yemen are food insecure. Some 7.3 million people need food and emergency aid, and 460,000 children under five years old are suffering from severe, acute malnutrition — which is up 200 per cent since 2014. Moreover, we hear that the United Nations Children's Fund now estimates that one child dies every 10 minutes in Yemen from

malnutrition-related causes. We know that Yemen is overwhelmingly dependent on imports for its food and that humanitarian aid is insufficient to meet the enormity of the need. Commercial food imports are critical to averting famine. And, just like the other three cases, in Yemen, an end to the conflict would do the most to help alleviate the humanitarian crisis.

That is why the United States supports the efforts of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General, Mr. Ismail Ould Cheikh Ahmed, to renew the cessation of hostilities and bring the parties back to the table for negotiations. There is no military solution to the conflict in Yemen. A comprehensive peace would require compromise from all sides for the sake of the Yemeni people. While the conflict continues, the parties must allow sustained access, both for humanitarian aid and for the commercial import of food, medicine, fuel and other basic supplies. These essential goods must be able to arrive through all of the ports of Yemen, and they must be able to move within Yemen. The United Nations verification and inspection mechanism plays a key role in facilitating food deliveries. However, constraints on access, particularly at Hudaydah — as Mr. O'Brien noted — contribute to the risk of famine. The closure of Sana'a airport, along with checkpoints on the ground, complicate relief efforts even more. The obstructions to aid in Yemen must be lifted.

The United States also urges international and regional partners to help Yemenis afford to buy food again. Contributing to the cash transfer programmes that provide payments to Yemen's neediest families would help prevent families from going hungry.

The United Nations has already declared a famine in certain areas of South Sudan. Responsibility for this famine lies squarely with the country's leaders, who are fighting a senseless conflict as their people starve. This conflict has caused almost 3.5 million people to flee their homes, forcing many to abandon their farms. People are hiding from the violence in swamps. They are surviving by eating waterlillies and grasses or taking enormous risks by trying to flee to neighbouring countries. But even as 100,000 people face starvation now and 5.5 million people face severe hunger this coming summer, South Sudan's leaders are making it even more difficult to deliver aid. Of couse, South Sudan's leaders have tried to say that they will solve these challenges, but look at what they are actually doing. There are reports that Government officials are expelling humanitarian staff from famine-stricken areas. This is an outrage.

The United States calls on the Government of South Sudan to uphold one of its most fundamental obligations to its citizens, that is, to keep them from starving to death and to allow humanitarian aid organizations to do their jobs in helping people. As Mr. O'Brien noted, with the Secretary-General's recent visit to Somalia, he brought much-needed attention to Somalia's worsening hunger crisis. The Somali people, however, continue to grapple with the impact of decades of conflict. We know that in 2011, nearly 260,000 Somalis died in a famine and now after several poor rainy seasons, Somalia yet again faces a looming famine with 50 per cent of the population in need of assistance. But the difference between then and now is that the international community is mobilized and in place to provide aid and that a new Federal Government of Somalia is ready to coordinate a drought response. But again, funding, as Mr. O'Brien noted, is the primary obstacle to saving lives. Of the $825 million required for famine prevention and response in Somalia, only 16.2 per cent of what is required has been received.

Finally, members of the Council just saw first hand the suffering in north-eastern Nigeria and the Lake Chad Basin, where more than 10 million civilians — two out of every three people in the region — are in need of humanitarian assistance. Some organizations already believe that famine occurred in parts of Nigeria last year and experts warn that up to 120,000 people could face famine by this summer.

It is a daunting challenge, as we saw, to get aid to this area, as the region's militaries continue to combat Boko Haram's brutality. In the midst of this fight, humanitarians and civilians are threatened by ambushes, suicide attacks and improvised explosive devices. But to save people from starving to death, humanitarians need safe ways to reach them — again echoing Under-Secretary-General O'Brien. We saw during our trip that there is scope for greater collaboration between military officials and humanitarian organizations, which could allow greater access. These groups are able to deliver aid to 2.1 million people now, which is a massive improvement from where we were last year, but 5.1 million people still need help. The United Nations and its partners are still not able reach more than 50 per cent of the people going hungry. That is why the United Nations and the Governments around the Lake Chad

basin have to do more to open up access in the areas hardest hit by the fight against Boko Haram.

In closing, the bottom line is that all of us know the steps required to prevent famine. The members of the Council and all other countries with influence need to press the parties on the ground to open up humanitarian access and minimize the impact of hostilities on the population. We also need to give the United Nations the resources it needs to help. Starvation is preventable, but only if we all have the will to act.

Mr. Bessho (Japan): I would like to thank the Russian Federation for calling a meeting on this very important issue. I would like to express my gratitude to Under-Secretary-General Mr. Stephen O'Brien for his briefing today. We must take his dire message very seriously.

I join others in thanking all humanitarian workers in these countries for their courage and dedication under such difficult conditions.

I would like to begin with Yemen. On 22 February, the Secretary-General announced that Yemen was one of four countries that faced a devastating level of food insecurity. Food insecurity and malnutrition in Yemen were concerns even before the onset of the current crisis in the summer of 2014, and Japan has continued to prioritize funding to the World Food Programme and the World Health Organization.

Mr. O'Brien has described the seriousness and complexity of the situation and the circumstances on the ground. Ongoing fighting decreases the volume of commercial imports to Yemen, which already struggles with food production, thereby increasing the price of food. The fighting deepens the economic crisis, delays the payment of salaries and makes it difficult for ordinary people to buy basic necessities. The fighting also prevents the United Nations and other humanitarian actors from delivering assistance.

Japan is deeply concerned by reports that Hudaydah will become the next battlefield after Mocha. Hudaydah is the backbone of Yemen's economy. If Hudaydah, and in particular its port, are severely damaged, economic and food insecurity will worsen. It is deeply regrettable that fighting, shelling and airstrikes are continuing. The Security Council is united in calling for a political solution, repeatedly underscoring that there is no military solution. The parties must listen to the voices of the Yemeni people and the international community and seek a ceasefire and sustainable peace.

Japan strongly supports the United Nations approach to the Yemen crisis, which begins with a credible cessation of hostilities monitored by the De-escalation and Coordination Committee and follows with face-to-face consultations by the parties with United Nations mediation. We see no serious alternatives. Japan believes there is no disagreement among P-5 members in this regard. We must also take very seriously the findings by the panel of experts of the Committee established pursuant to resolution 2140 (2014) that terrorist groups are actively exploiting the changing political environment and governance vacuums to recruit new members and stage new attacks.

Almost one year has passed since Mr. Ismail Ould Cheikh Ahmed announced a nation-wide cessation of hostilities just before the launch of the Kuwait round of talks. We are frustrated by slow progress in the political process and the worsening fighting, but we must continue to support Mr. Ould Cheikh Ahmed's efforts. Mr. Ould Cheikh Ahmed and the United Nations should be increasingly vocal and visible in drawing the attention of the international community to this issue. The Council should consider delivering a strong, unified message to the parties supporting the United Nations mediation role and urging the parties to cease hostilities and allow unimpeded and sustained humanitarian access immediately.

In light of the very concerning situation in South Sudan, Japan announced an approximately $22.4-million contribution in January to United Nations agencies for humanitarian and reconstruction projects. We are considering further assistance in response to worsening conditidions. Japan remains deeply concerned by the continued access restrictions for humanitarian actors. We urge President Kiir to honour his statement to Parliament on 21 February and his commitment to ensure unimpeded access. We need concrete action by the South Sudanese leadership.

Finally, Japan is concerned about the grave humanitarian situation in Somalia. We must not repeat the tragedy of 2011. If this situation is not addressed, progress in the Somali State formation process could be jeopardized. Japan has therefore pledged more than $22 million in humanitarian and development assistance to Somalia, part of which will provide urgent nutritional assistance. We are also seriously considering further

actions in response to the calls by the Somali people, as well as by the United Nations.

Mr. Skau (Sweden): Like others, I would like to thank the Russian Federation for requesting this important meeitng.

Let me start by thanking Emergency Relief Coordinator O'Brien for undertaking this important mission and for shining a spotlight on these worsening humanitarian crises. The present situation in countries like Yemen and South Sudan, where famine has now been declared, is utterly appalling and completely unacceptable. The Council has seen the crisis in the Lake Chad basin first hand. Immediate action is needed.

We therefore fully support the call of the Secretary-General for increased financial resources and improved humanitarian access. Emergency funding must be scaled up so that the United Nations system and its partners can deliver lifesaving assistance to those in need. Sweden has significantly increased its humanitarian assistance to those countries. We call on others to do the same. The humanitarian response must also be allowed to reach those in need; that means humanitarian access in all contexts. We call on all parties to respect humanitarian principles and to meet their obligations under international humanitarian law and human rights law.

Only political solutions can end the humanitarian suffering and bring sustainable peace and development. As we heard from the Deputy Secretary-General (see S/PV.7894), lasting recovery requires investment in comprehensive approaches that address conflict, chronic underdevelopment and the effects of climate change. We need to close the gap between humanitarian assistance and development interventions, and we need new ways of working to do so. We can all do better and we must do better.

Let us now turn to country-specific situations. I think that all situations discussed today are worth mentioning but, in the interest of time, I will focus on Yemen and South Sudan.

The situation in Yemen is both shocking and utterly intolerable. We cannot look the other way when we are told that 19 million people lack humanitarian protection; when we hear that 7 million people do not know where to find their next meal; that one child dies every 10 minutes, and perversely, that many of those who do escape the military conflict or starvation then risk dying for lack of simple medical interventions. There is an urgent need to supply additional shrinking reserves of medicine, food and fuel. All parties have an obligation to allow unimpeded humanitarian access. Parties must refrain from bureaucratic constraints to the delivery of aid, across front lines, facilitate commercial imports through all ports — especially the life-line that is Hudaydah — and resume commercial flights.

As we have heard, immediate action is needed to prevent widespread famine. However, the United Nations lacks the funding needed to scale up its response. The humanitarian response plan referred to by the Under-Secretary-General is currently only 6 per cent funded. In response, as we have heard today, Switzerland and Sweden, together with the Secretary-General and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, have taken the initiative to convene a high-level pledging event for the humanitarian crisis in Yemen on 25 April in Geneva. We invite all partners to attend and urge them to pledge generously and to quickly disburse increased support for the crisis. Humanitarian aid will never resolve the crisis in Yemen. There is an urgent need to renew the cessation of hostilities and to intensify efforts towards reaching a negotiated political agreement to provide a durable solution to the unfolding crisis.

In South Sudan, the deteriorating security situation is contributing directly to the humanitarian crisis. Only an end to the conflict can lead to a real improvement in the lives of the South Sudanese people. An immediate cessation of hostilities and a revitalized and truly inclusive political process, supported by the Intergovernmental Authority on Development, the African Union and the United Nations, is urgently needed. Let me also stress that it is totally unacceptable that aid workers in South Sudan are being attacked and killed. Humanitarians continue to face multiple obstacles, including the denial of access and bureaucratic impediments. We urge all parties, including the Government, to meet their obligations to provide full and unimpeded humanitarian access throughout South Sudan.

In conclusion, let me reiterate that the international community needs to take immediate action if widespread famine and death are to be avoided. The human catastrophe of failing of failing to do is unimaginable.

Mr. Sadykov (Kazakhstan): We appreciate today's update by Under-Secretary-General O'Brien and

his committed efforts to alleviate the humanitarian situation globally and in the Middle East and Africa, in particular. My delegation would like to make the following observations.

With regard to Yemen, an escalation of the military offensive has resulted in a further deterioration of the humanitarian situation in Yemen, leading to food shortages, rising food and fuel prices, disruption to agricultural production and other catastrophic consequences. Nearly 19 million people or more than two-thirds of the population need humanitarian assistance and protection. It is obvious that action must be launched so that lifesaving humanitarian programmes can alleviate the gravity of the crisis. To that end, the commercial air service to Sana'a should be resumed, together with strong control over imported goods, in accordance with resolution 2216 (2015) to facilitate the rapid delivery of medicine, food and other necessities.

The deterioration of the humanitarian situation can be mitigated only by ending the violence through a cessation of hostilities and an inclusive political process as solutions for durable peace. We urge all parties to ensure the unhindered movement of commercial and humanitarian supplies, without which millions of human beings are at risk of famine and death. All parties in conflict must come to the negotiating table to facilitate timely, full and unimpeded humanitarian access.

With regard to Somalia, we express great concern about the humanitarian situation and urge the international community to respond with urgent action to help families and individuals recover from the drought. We must, at all costs, avoid a humanitarian tragedy right now so that Somalia does not experience a situation similar to that of 2011. When the famine was declared at that time, half of those who needed help had already died. At this stage, it is crucial to strengthen the security sector through well-planned reform, whereby the international community could assist the new Government in fighting terrorist organizations.

On South Sudan, we express deep concern that famine was declared in February in parts of that country. Hunger and malnutrition, which have reached critical levels, could be aggravated further by the summer months if not addressed urgently with timely action. In that regard, we commend Under-Secretary-General O'Brien for being vocal with officials in Juba about the dire humanitarian situation in the country. It is clear that the present crisis is also a direct consequence of the conflict and the obstruction of humanitarian access. Kazakhstan underscores the need for a cessation of hostilities in South Sudan in order to end the suffering of the South Sudanese people. We call on the Government of South Sudan to provide access for humanitarian agencies to those parts of the country that were seriously affected by famine, given the fact that hundreds of thousands of people in South Sudan will starve unless relief workers gain access to populations in need.

Mr. Llorentty Solíz (Plurinational State of Bolivia) (*spoke in Spanish*): At the outset, I would like to thank the delegation of the Russian Federation for its initiative to convene today's debate. I would also like to thank Mr. O'Brien and his team for their work on one of the most sensitive issues for the international community, and it is in that spirit that we meet today. We intend to make every effort to ease the tragic situation in various parts of the world.

We, too, are concerned about the alarming developments in South Sudan and Somalia. We believe that the solution to such situations must be political in nature. We reiterate our support for the efforts of Mr. O'Brien and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs because we believe that their work is fundamental.

With regard to Yemen, we stated earlier that silence is eloquent because much can be conveyed through silence. I believe that with respect to the situation in Yemen, the Council's silence could well be interpreted in another way. We believe that it is imperative for us to look more closely at the situation in Yemen from every angle. We reiterate that the Plurinational State of Bolivia firmly believes that a solution to the conflict in Yemen will be reached only through a political process and not through the use of violence.

The statistics that Mr. O'Brien cited for us are quite shocking. We are talking about 21.2 million people who are in need of assistance and protection to meet their basic needs. Some 17 million people are suffering from food insecurity, which is a very elegant way of saying that they are on the verge of famine, and 3.3 million pregnant women are in a state of malnutrition. The representatives of the United States and Sweden recalled another figure, which is that a child dies in Yemen every 10 minutes owing to the lack of food. If we consider how many children have died since the

beginning of this meeting, we realize just how serious the situation is.

I will not repeat all of the statistics that Mr. O'Brien's briefing covered in such detail, but the situation in Yemen has resulted in more than 10,000 deaths with the war that began in March 2015. On behalf of the delegation of Bolivia, I reiterate that the Security Council has remained silent for too long on this issue, which, at the same time, is also suspicious. We are very concerned about the unsustainable humanitarian situation in Yemen and the famine threatening the lives of millions of people. We are also concerned by the limited humanitarian assistance that can be deployed continues to be attacked along with civilian installations.

Like other colleagues, we are very concerned in particular about the province of Hudaydah, which has been subject to restrictions despite the fact that thousands of Yemenis are in need of the humanitarian assistance that arrives through its port and about the constant attacks affecting its operational capacity. The United Nations Resident Coordinator/Humanitarian Coordinator and United Nations Development Programme Resident Representative for the Republic of Yemen, Jamie McGoldrick, told the *Washington Post* on 24 February that the attacks have destroyed bridges and roads throughout the entire port province of Hudaydah, while unexploded rockets landed inside the port, thereby further reducing the number of imports and vessels willing to travel to Yemen. A unilateral blockade has been imposed that restricts food and medicine imports on which millions of Yemenis depend and that now have to be transferred from ports in the south to reach the millions of people who risk dying of hunger in the north. Of its food and medicine, Yemen depends on approximately 20 per cent imports, and to prevent them is really an attack on the Yemeni population and runs contrary and is an affront to international humanitarian law.

In that regard, we believe that there is something concrete that we can do today in the Security Council, and that is to send out an absolutely clear, unequivocal and unanimous message that the restrictions on Hudaydah port have to be lifted to provide access for humanitarian assistance. Of course, it will take time and other actions depending on the economic needs to attend to the situation, but we believe that at the very least the Council has the obligation to unanimously reiterate its call to lift restrictions on that port.

Mr. Aboulatta (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): I thank Mr. Stephen O'Brien, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, for his briefing and the tireless efforts of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in providing humanitarian assistance to all areas of Yemen. We and all countries of the world highly value their work. My statement will focus on the situations in Yemen, South Sudan and Somalia.

With regard to the situation in Yemen, my delegation is concerned about the deterioration of the humanitarian situation affecting our brotherly Yemeni people. We stress the need to allow the unconditional access of humanitarian assistance to all areas of Yemen. We regret that Houthis continue to stall in providing access for and entry of assistance in Taiz city. We also denounce the fact that they did not allow the Under-Secretary-General to enter Taiz city during his visit to Yemen. We call upon the international community to increase its contributions at the humanitarian level in Yemen to ensure sufficient funding for relief agencies.

Moreover, it is important to continue to promote the efficient delivery of assistance in Yemen once it reaches the country, including through improving the delivery networks of relief agencies. We also call for studying the possibility of deploying United Nations observers of the stocks controlled by Houthis, especially at Hudaydah port, so as to end certain practices that have been recently reported by the coalition, including stalling the entrance of authorized ships into the port, which only increases the suffering of our brotherly Yemeni people.

The humanitarian suffering affecting the people of South Sudan has increased over the past month and reached unprecedented levels. The vicious cycle of fighting that has been waged since 2013 has resulted in the displacement of millions of civilians. Hundreds of thousands have become the victims of hunger and malnutrition. There is therefore an urgent need to facilitate access to the United Nations Mission in South Sudan in the affected areas in a rapid, safe and unhindered manner to allow it to implement the mandate entrusted to it by the Security Council. Today more than ever, the people of South Sudan are in need of the support of the international community and donors. The necessary resources required to fight this humanitarian crisis have risen to an estimated at $1.6 billion, the greater part of which has yet to be raised.

We express our deep concern with regard to the increasingly serious consequences of the crisis resulting from the drought and malnutrition affecting the people of the Somalia. We must urgently address this crisis, which threatens to impede all political and security gains achieved thus far in Somalia, while taking into account the competition to draw on already scarce natural resources and the conflicts that it could cause in the affected regions. We also stress the need to increase regional and international efforts to provide relief for areas affected by drought and ensure the delivery of humanitarian assistance to Somali citizens whose number is estimated at 6 million.

It is also important to support the ongoing coordination among different parties in the relief process and ensure the participation the Somali Federal Government and all concerned regional administrations in every phase. If we hope to end the suffering of the Somali people, we must build on the lessons learned from our experience in dealing with the drug crisis that has affected Somalia since 2011. We must also promote the capacity-building of Somali institutions so that they can mitigate the economic and humanitarian consequences of future crises.

To conclude, I would like to stress that the common denominator of the three countries is their ongoing political crises. Despite their different contexts, the continuing severe deterioration of the respective humanitarian situations is a direct result of the absence of a political settlement in the three countries. We can sustainably improve the humanitarian situations and end the suffering of civilians in Yemen, South Sudan and Somalia only through an inclusive political process that paves the way for a political solution based on the relevant Security Council resolutions. Despite its importance, humanitarian assistance will never be able to provide a final long-term solution for the crises affecting the people of those countries.

Mr. Cardi (Italy): I wish to thank the Russian Federation for requesting this meeting and Under-Secretary-General O'Brien for his briefing and the hard work that they and all the humanitarian actors put into their daily activities.

During his recent visit to Yemen, Secretary-General Guterres highlighted the interconnection between today's crises and the importance of promoting an integrated approach to peace and security. We fully support this vision, particularly in the light of the recent Security Council trip to the Lake Chad basin, and we subscribe to the Secretary-General's call for immediate famine-prevention assistance.

Italy, like others, is of course seriously concerned about the situation in Yemen and the violent destruction of lives that Under-Secretary-General O'Brien has so eloquently described today and in his briefing of 26 January (see S/PV.7870), which was an eye-opener in many ways. Italy is already providing help to the Yemeni people in the areas of nutrition and aid to women and girls who are the victims of violence. This year, we plan to make a further contribution, to be announced at the next donor conference in Geneva, but we have also taken note of the urgency of today's appeal.

But creating a fund, of course, is not enough. The assistance must reach those in need. We therefore call on all the parties to the conflict to guarantee full, speedy and unimpeded humanitarian access at all times. Needless to say, there can be no military solution to the conflict in Yemen. A political agreement is the only way out, so all parties to the conflict must ultimately show their commitment to negotiating a solution under the auspices of the United Nations and the Special Envoy. The Italian Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs is currently visiting the region to discuss the political dimensions of the crisis and how Italy can lend political and humanitarian assistance.

The crisis in Yemen is closely linked to that in neighbouring Somalia, and we commend the Under-Secretary-General for the regional perspective underlining the connections between the two. Somali refugees in Yemen and returnees from Yemen are also a matter for concern, since they may be contributing to the illicit trafficking connections between transnational organized crime and terrorist groups, whose presence in the area is growing. Italy will continue to support Somalia's newly elected President Farmajo and the Somalian authorities in their efforts to deal with a difficult situation, with a particular focus on issues such as the empowerment of women and young people, nutrition, social protection and resilience, access to health services, and demining.

But that must be a collective effort, and in that regard I would like to commend the generosity that has been shown by Somalia's neighbours, particularly Ethiopia and Kenya, in hosting Somali refugees from drought, climate change and security threats, as was also pointed out by the Secretary-General during his

recent visit. We also welcome the round table convened by President Farmajo in Mogadishu recently and look forward to further results from the Intergovernmental Authority on Development conference held on 25 March on Somali refugees, and to the conference to be held on Somalia in London in May.

With regard to South Sudan, I would like to comment briefly on two specific aspects of the crisis that are of particular concern for us. The first is the limitations imposed on humanitarian access for the United Nations Mission in South Sudan and for non-governmental organizations. The second is the potential role of South Sudanese churches in alleviating the crisis and strengthening the population's resilience. Churches are often the last bastion for humanitarian assistance at the grassroots level, and yet, as demonstrated in the case of Kajo Keji two weeks ago, they are increasingly subject to intimidation, harassment and violence. We firmly condemn attacks on religious freedom and the safety of the country's religious places, and reiterate our firm support to the Council of South Sudan Churches in its brave efforts to uphold peace, dialogue and reconciliation in the region.

Mr. Vitrenko (Ukraine): I would first like to thank Under-Secretary-General O'Brien for his faithful and striking account of the scale of the humanitarian crisis in the three countries he just visited. For the sake of brevity and the President's call for concision, I will focus on the situation in Yemen, while also touching on some political and security issues, which, as has been rightly noted by Mr. O'Brien and reinforced by Egypt and other delegations, directly affect the humanitarian issues in all three of these countries.

Like other speakers, we are concerned by the worsening humanitarian situation in Yemen and urge all the parties to ensure the sustainable delivery of humanitarian supplies, without which millions of Yemenis are at risk of famine and death. We welcome the first humanitarian truck's delivery of vital medical equipment to Taiz city. However, we deplore the fact that Mr. O'Brien was prevented from visiting Taiz, and echo his call to all the parties to the conflict to accept their responsibilities under international humanitarian and human rights law, including guaranteeing sustainable, full and unimpeded humanitarian access.

Ukraine remains convinced of the urgent need to put an end to the violence in Yemen and reach a sustainable political solution to the conflict. In that context, we are increasingly concerned about the surge in rocket attacks launched by Houthi forces in Yemen on targets located within Saudi Arabian territory and on maritime vessels operating near Bab Al-Mandeb. Keeping that important shipping passage safe and secure is of paramount importance. The Al-Houthi-Saleh forces have also increased their use of ballistic missiles. We call for such attacks to cease immediately and urge that the necessary steps to be taken to de-escalate the situation. In that regard, it is vital that any further weapon shipments to the Houthi-Saleh forces be blocked if we are to prevent escalation of the conflict. Delivering ever more sophisticated weaponry to the Houthi fighters is not going to help the situation.

Achieving a negotiated political solution to the conflict in Yemen continues to be complicated. We reiterate our support to Special Envoy Ismail Ould Cheikh Ahmed in his pursuit of such a solution, and we welcome his recent efforts to revive the talks, as well as Jordan's contribution to them. Without meaningful dialogue, the results may be disastrous, and the only party to benefit from that would be the terrorist groups that are increasingly active in Yemen. It is disconcerting to see Al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula continue to demonstrate its ability to expand its operational support base in Yemen and exploit the deep lines of division in war-torn Yemeni society. We must work collectively to prevent that from happening.

Mr. Shen Bo (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): China would like to thank the representative of the Russian Federation for requesting the convening of today's meeting, and Under-Secretary-General O'Brien for his briefing on his recent visit to Yemen and other countries. We commend the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs for its work to ease the humanitarian situation in those countries, and call on the international community to extend a helping hand in order to alleviate that crisis.

We have frequently discussed the situations in South Sudan and Somalia, so in order to save time I will focus on the situation in Yemen.

China is troubled by the escalating conflict there and concerned about the worsening humanitarian situation, the recurring attacks on civilians and civilian facilities, the famine facing the Yemeni people and other risk factors. The humanitarian situation is crying out for improvement, and the Yemeni people need external support. China urges the parties to the conflict in Yemen

to abide strictly by international humanitarian law, stop the attacks on civilians and civilian targets, actively support the United Nations in its humanitarian relief efforts and ensure safe and unimpeded humanitarian access. The international community should also join the efforts to improve the humanitarian situation. China has been providing humanitarian relief to the Yemeni people, including a shipment of medical supplies worth ¥2,000-million that is expected to be in place very soon, in the first half of the year, and we will continue to provide such assistance as we can.

Peace and stability in Yemen are essential to efforts aimed at fundamentally relieving the humanitarian situation in that country, and political dialogue is the only way to achieve lasting peace there. China urges all the parties to demonstrate a sincere desire for reconciliation, cease hostilities immediately and prevent the situation from escalating. We support Special Envoy Ould Cheikh Ahmed in the scaling up of his good offices and in supporting regional countries in their work to facilitate peace talks and build confidence in order to help Yemen restore stability at an early date.

Mr. Woldegerima (Ethiopia): We thank Under-Secretary-General Stephen O'Brien for the comprehensive briefing on his recent visit to Yemen and other countries in our region, including Somalia and South Sudan, which are facing enormous humanitarian challenges. Nor can I forget to mention his visit to the Somali region of Ethiopia, which is facing a drought situation.

What we heard from Mr. O'Brien is indeed disturbing, given the scale and magnitude of the humanitarian challenge. We take this opportunity to express appreciation to the Secretary-General, who undertook his first field visit to Somalia to show solidarity and make a strong appeal to the international community for support.

Like others, we will restrict ourselves to the humanitarian situation in Yemen, which is indeed a source of grave concern. The people of Yemen are at risk of falling into famine if action is not taken now. Therefore, the international community must respond urgently and decisively to avert a humanitarian tragedy. In this regard, we support the call made by Mr. O'Brien for an immediate international response. Ensuring safe and unhindered humanitarian access is indeed imperative to deliver much-needed assistance to the millions of Yemenis affected. We express appreciation to all humanitarian workers on the ground, who are operating under extremely difficult circumstances to reach people in need.

We agree with Mr. O'Brien that addressing the huge funding gap is absolutely critical to meet the urgent humanitarian needs in Yemen. We note with concern that only 6.3 per cent of the required $2.1 billion has been received so far. We hope that the high-level pledging event for the humanitarian crisis in Yemen, to be hosted by the United Nations and the Governments of Switzerland and Sweden on 25 April in Geneva, will contribute to mobilizing the necessary support to address the existing funding gap.

Finally, we agree with all the other members that the security, economic and humanitarian challenges in Yemen cannot be addressed without finding a resolution to the Yemeni crisis. That is why achieving a comprehensive political settlement should be an urgent priority. In this regard, we will continue to support the efforts of the United Nations Special Envoy, Mr. Ismail Ould Cheikh Ahmed, to resume inclusive peace talks and achieve a cessation of hostilities according to the relevant Security Council resolutions.

Mr. Ciss (Senegal) (*spoke in French*): I wish to thank the Russian Federation for having requested this briefing and Mr. Stephen O'Brien for the very important information that he has provided us on the humanitarian situation on the ground.

My delegation fully endorses the very relevant statements made by previous speakers, which is why I would simply like to touch upon several points, so as not to repeat what others have said.

We are particularly concerned by the deterioration of the humanitarian situation in the four countries: Yemen, South Sudan, Somalia and Nigeria. Indeed, the figures and the very sombre predictions are chilling and canot but prod our collective conscience.

Concerning Yemen, my delegation would like to remind the parties to the conflict, in particular the Houthis and their allies, of their obligations pursuant to international law, among which is the need to ensure immediate, lasting, secure and unhindered access to all those who require assistance throughout Yemen. My delegation wishes also to urge the parties, in particular the Houthis and their allies, to resume in good faith negotiations based on a realistic approach and trust so as to achieve a political solution, which is the only way to

put an end to this crisis and its disastrous humanitarian and security consequences.

The famine that is afflicting several areas of South Sudan is obviously a great source of concern to us. More than ever before, the country requires the assistance and support of the international community to enable it not only to overcome this humanitarian crisis but also to strengthen its own capacity to urgently address extreme situations such the current famine.

Concerning the situation in the countries of the Lake Chad basin and in Somalia, we believe, as Stephen said, that the situation and in particular the famine that is approaching is not inevitable. We acknowledge the efforts that have been made by partners and the United Nations to help these countries, but we believe that the international community must do better and do more on an urgent basis given the current context, characterized by the proliferation in some of those countries of terrorist groups, which are the primary beneficiaries of any deterioration in the humanitarian situation.

On this point, we wish to express the hope that the visit that the Council has just made to the Lake Chad basin countries, which made it possible to take stock of the scale of the challenges, is just the first step towards not only mobilizing the international community in order to make it possible for all four countries to overcome the humanitarian ordeal they are facing, but also allowing them to demonstrate greater resilience in the face of the many challenges that confront them.

The President: I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of the United Kingdom.

I should like to begin by thanking Stephen for his briefing as well as for his initiative and stamina in confronting the toughest humanitarian challenges that the world presents, and through him may I pay tribute to all humanitarian workers responding to these humanitarian challenges, which are of a scale so unprecedented, so unacceptable that it is almost unimaginable. More than 20 million men, women and children risk starving to death in the next six months. That is equivalent to nearly the entire population of Australia — absolutely astounding in 2017.

Let me focus briefly on South Sudan, Somalia and then Yemen.

In South Sudan, we need to see the Government bring an overdue end to the fighting and improve humanitarian access. It is completely unacceptable that people in famine-affected areas such Mayardit are not receiving the food and medical supplies that could save their lives. These are exactly the messages that we need to keep sending at the highest levels, including at our upcoming meeting on South Sudan chaired by the British Foreign Secretary later this month. We need to match our messages with our money. The United Kingdom is the second-largest bilateral donor to South Sudan, but we cannot do it alone. We are matching our money with our deeds by strengthening the United Nations Mission in South Sudan by almost 400 peacekeepers, including military engineers and a field hospital. We call on others to follow suit.

In Somalia, we have a crucial window to take action before the drought takes hold. If we act early and decisively, we can prevent a repeat of 2011, when more than a quarter of a million people died through famine. Again, we must all play our part. The United Kingdom is providing emergency food and safe drinking water to 1 million people, but more, much more, is needed. If we do not step up, others will. Al-Shabaab is poised to step into the breach left by any lack of national or international resources. If we abandon the people of Somalia, we risk reversing the political and security gains of the past four years by forcing them to turn towards Al-Shabaab in desperation. I therefore strongly urge other donors to come forward.

In Yemen, the situation is equally grave. Civilians are paying the highest price for the continuing conflict, so we urge all sides to facilitate safe access for the United Nations and non-governmental organizations to deliver vital, life-saving assistance. That means that all parties must uphold their obligations under international humanitarian law and do everything feasible to prevent civilian casualties and damage to civilian infrastructure, because the continued flow of commercial supplies into Yemen will be critical if we are to prevent famine. Eight-five per cent of Yemen's food needs over the past year have been met through commerical imports. All parties need to ensure the continued facilitation of commercial and humanitarian imports and their onward distribution, while we must continue to support the United Nations Verification and Inspection Mechanism for Yemen in carrying its out crucial work.

In tandem, we need to find ways to stabilize the banking sector and solve the liquidity crisis so that importers have the means and the funds to pay for foods and basic goods. Again, we need to step up our own

efforts. Last year's United Nations appeal was funded to only 60 per cent; this year, it is only 6 per cent funded. We need to give generously so that that the Resident Coordinator has the resources he needs to tackle the crisis. For our part, the United Kingdom has increased its humanitarian aid to Yemen to $125 million, and in both 2015 and 2016 we helped more than a million Yemenis with food, medical supplies and clean water.

Ultimately, however, it will remain difficult to address Yemen's humanitarian needs while the conflict is ongoing. We call on parties to engage meaningfully with the United Nations Special Envoy's proposals for peace, and to make progress towards a ceasefire and an enduring political settlement. The United Kingdom will continue to play a leading role in supporting his efforts to achieve that.

I now resume my functions as President of the Security Council.

The meeting rose at 4.30 p.m.